

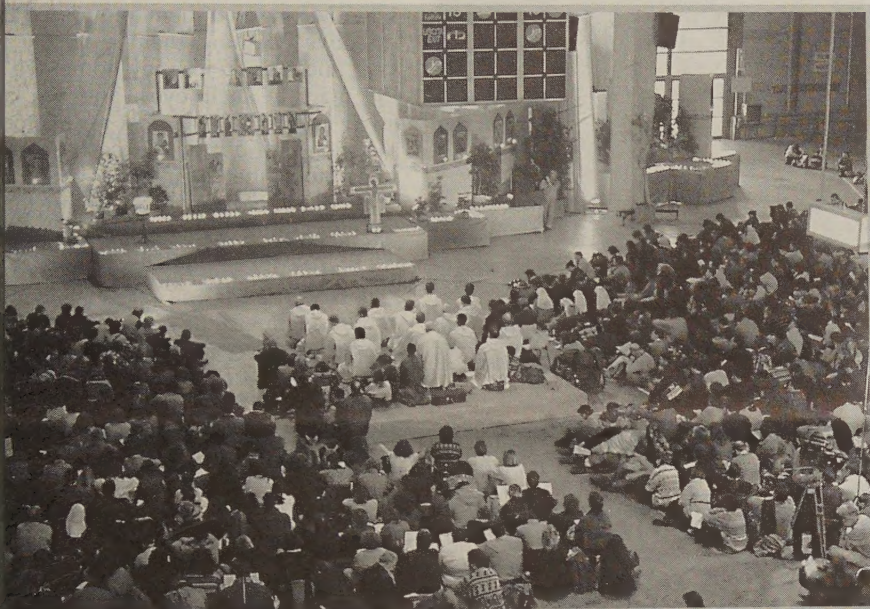
Letter from Taizé

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THE YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING AT MILAN

The best is built up through a simple trusting

"Ciao! Grazie! Arrivederci!..." How many people heard these words and how many people repeated them during the five days spent at Milan, from 28th December to 1st January? They were heard not only in the streets and squares of the city, but even more often, and certainly with more feeling, in the tens of thousands of families which had opened their homes.

The welcome in the parishes and families of Milan deeply touched the hundred thousand or so young adults who took part in the meeting. These young people came from all the points of the compass. Among them, there were notably several thousand Orthodox, from Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia, and Ukraine. Seven special trains brought a proportion of the tens of thousands of young people from Po-

land. Three thousand had undertaken the journey from Croatia; six thousand seven hundred came from the three Baltic countries.

The words of Koffi Annan, General Secretary of the United Nations, were true for all of them. In his message of support he wrote: "Your gathering and the faith which inspires it are unique. At a time when marginalization, uncertainty, and indifference are spreading their pernicious effects to the four cor-

ners of the planet, your demonstration is a breath of hope for the future of humanity."

The letter of Brother Roger, distributed on the first day, begins with these words: "Are there realities which make life beautiful and of which it can be said that they bring a kind of fulfilment, an inner joy? Yes, there are. And one of these realities bears the name of trust." Many people were captivated by just this experience: yes, during these five days, life was beautiful, probably because of the sharing of a simple trust, the trust of the families who opened their homes and the trust of the young people who had set out on their journey without knowing by whom or how they would be welcomed. In the words of another phrase of Brother Roger's letter, "What is best in each of us is built up through a simple trusting".

BEFORE WE KNEW THEM WE LOVED THEM

During the days following the meeting, hundreds of small meetings were held in the parishes of Milan to listen to echoes from the families. Someone expressed what is without doubt one of the secrets of such a generous welcome: "Before we knew them, we loved them."

The extent of the hospitality owed a lot to thousands of the young people of Milan who, throughout the autumn, prepared the meeting, gave information to those who were involved, prayed, and organized the welcome in about seven hundred parishes of the region. This preparation was continuously supported and encouraged by the Archdiocese of Milan as a whole with the concern that everyone should be able to find a way to be involved. In the parishes, small groups were formed, often of people of very different ages, to prepare the prayer and organize efficiently the welcome of one to three hundred people per parish.

With them, ten or so Brothers of Taizé, some sisters and about thirty other young adults from Taizé went from parish to parish. Many young people from neighbouring cities, Turin,



go about the house on tip-toe. But before they left, they gave us a few little presents. They gave us the gift of a lesson in dignity, of discretion, by speaking in low voices so as not to disturb anyone, and of respect by trying not to alter the balance of our family, by never coming back late. On New Year's Day when we greeted them and kissed them goodbye, wishing them a happy new year and a good journey home, we saw the tears in their eyes; and we came away one by one, almost on tip-toe, in the silence of our house, each one of us understanding that their tears were a way of thanking each member of our family for everything we had done to offer them a bit of welcome to them, to help them understand that we loved them."

A MEETING OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM EUROPE AND THE WORLD

In the great diversity of people, and the countries of Europe were represented, including Malta, Greece, and Albania. Not a single country was missing. For the first time there was a group of sixty-six young people from Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. There were young people from other continents too. Christelle, a little girl from Rwanda who lives at Taizé with her family, received greetings evening after evening for the people from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, the people from Chad, Kenya, Mali, South Africa, Sudan, Congo, and Zimbabwe, and then again for those from Australia, Canada, the United States, Korea, the Philippines, Japan, India, Indonesia, China, Mongolia....

It was also Christelle who said words of thanks for the messages sent by Pope John Paul II, the Orthodox Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, the European Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Ecclesial Communion of the Reformed Churches, Lutherans, and Methodists, and also the General Secretary of the United Nations.

Genoa, and Brescia, came to help make these visits in the capital of Lombardy. The greater part of the preparation consisted in looking for families who were ready to offer two square metres of their home to welcome someone. The young people of Milan often did not limit themselves to the families that were regular parish members, but had the courage to broaden this search by going to other families as well, for example in the markets.

The Milanese themselves were surprised. Suddenly, there were looking at their city in a new way. Some of them said: "We from the north of Italy have the reputation of being closed, of being afraid of strangers, and we install a lot of locks and alarms on our doors and windows! But now a lot of us have shown trust. And what a joy it was to see the attitude of the young people we welcomed — they were so considerate! We learnt how to communicate in a different way. A lot of people in our area of the city say that if we had to do it again, it would be easy to find twice as many places for people to stay! Many of us joined in the morning prayers and sometimes in the evening prayers at the Fiera, and almost everyone took part in the new year vigil. These times of prayer have left their mark on us."

MORE THAN TWENTY THOUSAND FAMILIES OFFERED A WELCOME

How to describe the experience of the twenty thousand or more families that offered a welcome to the young people? Here are two accounts:

"For our little parish, well outside the city among fields of maize and rice, the meeting really came as a shock, especially to the twenty-nine families who offered a welcome. Some of them realized for the first time what the parish

community means; for others it was a chance to become known, to find their place in the local community. We asked a student to give us English lessons so that we could communicate directly with the young people we were welcoming: for many of us it was as if we had some new children!"

"Our family opened its doors to welcome young people for the European Meeting. We tried to answer their expectations. We sought to interiorize the gentleness of the songs, the brief and striking phrases sung in different languages, the long and penetrating silences. And then Magdalena and Malgorzata, two Polish girls, arrived at our house. They came through the door of our home with a smile, without showing any sign of tiredness after the long and exhausting voyage from Warsaw. We were struck by their simplicity, their authenticity, their lively and attentive look. Magdalena is a university student; Malgorzata comes from a large family and works as a fashion designer: she has to get up every morning at 4 a.m. During these days together, they did not cause any problems, but tried to



Many people came from the countries of central Europe, each with its own characteristics and expectations. For Bernd, from Zagreb, it was the contact with the families and young people of Milan that was essential: "I would like to say 'thank you' to the young people of Milan. Each day of the meeting was a gift for me. We are bringing new vitality and energy back from Milan. We have much to learn from these young people who welcomed us with so much warmth and love: we need to learn solidarity, how to be there for each other, how to live together and how to build a better world together: a better today, a better tomorrow."

Bernd, from Germany, made the same discovery: "The openness I found has given me courage and the strength to be open to others and to trust them myself as well. I've had the experience of being welcomed as I am, and now I understand how to welcome others. I am more and more that it is important to trust rather than to make demands, to be thankful rather than to judge."

A JOYFUL AND PEACEFUL INVASION

The city as a whole was marked by what some of the newspapers called a joyful and peaceful invasion. Suddenly the streets, the buses, the underground, the trains rang with songs and all kinds of languages, in quiet good humour. It would have been almost impossible, in view of the number of participants and the location of the meeting centre, for the public transport not to have been very overcrowded from time to time. Thanks to everyone's patience and goodwill, and the extra transport laid on the different routes, the transport worked out well.

As an echo of the welcome given by the city, the Mayor of Milan wrote these words:

"Through your splendid testimony of love and fraternity, Milan is opening up today to young people from over the whole world. Among the realities that



make life beautiful, you have chosen trust, trust in God, on this pilgrimage of trust on earth. These words of Brother Roger seem to me very beautiful, and they are particularly apt for this meeting. Milan, a centre renowned for its people's readiness to volunteer, a city open to young people who, because they respect themselves, also respect the highest values, a happily multi-ethnic city that is always ready to welcome those who arrive in peace, greets you and thanks you. All of us today, all of us feel in our hearts that we are young people from Taizé.

ALL THE BELLS RANG OUT

The central gathering was organized in eight halls of the immense exhibition park, the "Milan Fiera". The common prayers took place simultaneously in four of these halls, which had been arranged and decorated in a way that made them a little like eastern churches. The size of the halls made it possible to build an "iconostasis" — a grouping of illuminated icons of great beauty. These prayers were marked not only by the

depth of the singing but by the quality of the silence.

Every evening, surrounded by a group of children, Brother Roger led a short meditation, very briefly, so as to allow plenty of time for prayer. The first day, he expressed the sense of the meeting: "Today, in vast regions of the world, young people have distanced themselves from faith. It is this distancing from trust in God that has led our community to grasp how good it would be, without great means, to bring young people together at Taizé or in a big city, as we are doing for these few days. For what purpose? To seek to understand, and to seek to pray together."

The diocese wanted to give a special sign of welcome: at the moment of the first prayer, at 7 o'clock on 28th December, the bells began to ring, not only in all the churches of Milan, but in all the villages and towns of the diocese.

On the evening of 31st December, Cardinal Martini joined in the common prayer, and he said: "I am happy to be with you for this last common prayer at the Fiera.... I give my warmest greetings to Brother Roger; I thank him for his words and for the example of his life, wholly concentrated on the gift of reconciliation. I would also like to thank the brothers of Taizé for having chosen Milan as a step in the 'Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth' which has been traversing Europe for many years. For the Church of Milan, the meeting these last few days has constituted more than a commitment: it has been a great gift. You have woken up in us and in this city the sense of prayer, of listening to the Word, of welcome, and of reconciliation between people and between peoples. For all this, we want to say 'thank you'."



*Why read the Bible?
What can we get from it?*

*What about differing
interpretations of the Bible?
How can we know which ones are right?*

In the Bible there are enthralling stories, for example the story of Joseph, envied, hated and almost murdered by his brothers, but who ends by forgiving them and by saving his whole family (Gen 37-50); or the adventure of the apostle Paul who, without financial means, goes across the known world and changes the course of history (The Acts of the Apostles). The Bible is also a book of poetry which reaches the heights of beauty in the Psalms, the Song of Songs, and parts of the book of Isaiah. The first chapters of Genesis, the books of Ecclesiastes or Job raise questions about the meaning of existence or the question of evil which remain right up to date. And every reader, whether a believer or not, can find in the Bible an invaluable guide for their ethical choices, from the commandment "You shall not kill" through to the prophets' calls for justice and sharing (e.g. Is 58) and the words of Jesus about non-violence and love for one's enemies (Mt 5-7, Lk 6).

But there is more. The Bible speaks to us of men and women who have experienced the presence of God in their lives. Together, they form the "great cloud of witnesses" who surround us and encourage us (see Heb 11-12). This becomes familiar to us as we read. Abraham is a guide along the way of faith: without knowing where he is going, he puts his confidence in God's promise. The Biblical characters who we see in despair — Hagar who finds herself rejected, the widows of Zarephath and Nain who see their children

To avoid misunderstandings, it is useful to ask ourselves what was the intention of the author of the text in question. If someone wants to understand one of Saint Paul's letters they should ask whom the apostle was writing to, in what circumstances, and in answer to what question. Every Biblical passage can receive clarification in this way from its context: both its immediate context in the book it comes from and also from its context as a part of the Bible as a whole. Thus it is impossible to grasp the message of hope of the book of Revelation if one does not understand the allusions to the prophets and without having constantly in mind the person of Jesus as the Gospels present him. And let us remember finally that we are not the only readers of the Bible, nor are we the first. Belonging to the Church, we are heirs of traditions of interpretation which have been proved over the centuries.

Nevertheless, there will always be hesitations over the exact meaning of a passage. But is this a bad thing? The Bible itself invites us not to be afraid of the variety of its meanings. "One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard" (Psalm 62.11). Jesus speaks in parables because his word ought not to remain what it is: at first only a little seed, it should multiply and "produce" a hundredfold (Lk 8.8). The whole of the Bible is like that. It is written and printed, but at the same time it is the word: the living Word of God which grows and produces meaning. "The scriptures

Two Questions about reading the Bible

die (Gen 21; 1 Kings 17; Lk 7); the prophets Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah who cannot take any more and ask to die (1 Kings 19, Jr 20, Jonah 4) — become our friends in trouble. With Hannah, with Mary and Zechariah we can sing (1 Sam 2, Lk 1). When, through the Gospels, we accompany Peter in his generosity, then in his cowardice and also in his reunion with Christ, our weaknesses and even our failures and our faults need not worry us so much any more.

In the midst of all these witnesses of the presence of God is the "faithful witness" (Rev 1.5). The most precious thing the Bible gives us is to get to know Christ. Reading the Gospels — and also reading "all the scriptures", because, as Christ himself said, they speak about him (Lk 24.27-44) — introduces us little by little to friendship with him. Everyone can become "his beloved disciple" and read the Bible not just to find the answers to our problems, but to hear the voice of our friend and also to speak to him. Someone has said that opening the Bible near the middle, you can find yourself reading these words: "Speak to me, you whom my heart loves...."

grow with those who read them" (Gregory the Great, 6th century).

This is why Christians have not always been as preoccupied as we are today with the original sense of a text. Rather than being anxious to explain the Bible, they wanted the Bible to explain to them the life with Christ. They were not very interested in determining the date of the Exodus from Egypt or to know how the crossing of the Red Sea could have taken place. In these stories, they discovered the sense of the paschal mystery and the waters of baptism in which, like a new Red Sea, stand forever between slavery and the freedom of the baptized. This is true even of details: Saint Paul finds in an old agricultural rule of the Law of Moses ("Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain") a confirmation for his practice of appealing for gifts (1 Cor 9.9-10)!

This great freedom in reading the scriptures is kept from becoming arbitrary when we recognize that the scriptures are holy. In other words, it is not we who master the sense of the Bible, but it is the scriptures that master us and shape us and unite us to Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD MAY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 24,16-35

1 Sat Jn 15:9-17 Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

2 SUN Jn 14:1-12 Jesus said to his disciples: In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

3 Mon Gn 28:10-22 The Lord says: I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go. I will not abandon you before accomplishing what I have promised you.

4 Tue Ps 16 Lord, you teach me the way of life. In your presence here is fullness of joy.

5 Wed Ep 3:14-21 May God strengthen you in your inner being through the Spirit, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

6 Thu Gn 50:15-21 Joseph forgave his brothers saying: Do not be afraid; it is for me to put myself in God's place? The harm you planned to do to me has, by God's design, been turned to good.

7 Fri Ps 130 My soul is waiting for the Lord, I rely on his promise; my soul relies on the Lord more than a night-watchman on the coming of dawn.

8 Sat 2 Th 2:16-3:5 May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such ceaseless encouragement and sure hope, encourage and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

9 SUN Jn 14:15-21 Jesus said: I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor who will stay with you for ever — the Spirit of truth.

10 Mon Is 61:1-4 The Lord sent me to comfort all who mourn, to clothe them in festive garments instead of despondency.

11 Tue Ph 1:27-30 St. Paul writes: Stand firm, one in mind and spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

12 Wed Dt 30:15-20 Choose life: loving the Lord your God, listening to the Lord's voice, holding fast to him — for in this your life consists.

13 Thu Mt 28:16-20 ASCENSION Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of time.

14 Fri Rm 15:1-6 May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves following the example of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

15 Sat Jn 16:32-33 Jesus said: In the world you will have hardship. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

16 SUN Jn 17:1-11 Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

17 Mon Hos 6:3-6 Let us strive to know the Lord; that he will come is as certain as the dawn. He will come to us like the spring rain upon the earth.

18 Tue Dn 3:51-90 Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart, praise and glorify him forever! For God has rescued us from the hand of death.

19 Wed Dn 2:19-23 Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

20 Thu Jn 16:12-15 Jesus said: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking of his own accord but will say only what he has been told.

21 Fri Ph 3:4-14 Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

22 Sat Is 11:1-10 Isaiah said: The Spirit will be upon the Messiah. He will not judge by appearances, but he will judge the weak with justice and give fair sentence for the humble in the land.

23 SUN Jn 20:19-31 PENTECOST The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

24 Mon Ezk 3:10-11 God said to Ezekiel: Son of man, listen carefully to all my words and take them to heart, then go to your compatriots and speak to them.

25 Tue Rm 10:5-10 The Word of God is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart.

26 Wed Ga 5:16-26 Since the Spirit is our life, let our actions be guided by the Spirit.

27 Thu Rm 12:1-13 Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God.

28 Fri 2 Th 3:1-5 May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

29 Sat 1 Co 12:3-13 There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Spirit; there are different ways of serving, but it is the same Lord; there are many forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all.

30 SUN Jn 3:16-17 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

31 Mon Zp 3:14-18a Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

Two disciples are on the way to Emmaus. After an experience which has been too much for them, the meaning of their life seems to have suddenly collapsed. They do not really know any longer who or what they can rely on. They feel as though they are elsewhere, and they do not realize that there is Another walking beside them. They do not recognize the Risen One. But despite all this, he enables them to make the about turn within themselves which leads from being turned in on themselves to the joy of giving. Almost without their realizing it, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" they will say... but not until later on.

When they reach the crossroads, it is now up to the disciples to take the initiative. "Stay with us!" A "yes" is already taking shape in the midst of the fog of their doubts and weaknesses. When Jesus breaks the bread, "their eyes are opened". From now on, they will have a different way of looking at things: they will see with the eyes of the Other, with eyes that do not rest on the surface of things but see into the invisible and which see other people and the world as God sees them; with eyes that perceive the seeds of the resurrection on earth.

Jesus vanishes away from them straight away, but from now on they themselves will be able to see further and wider. The dispersion of their thoughts and the storm of contradictions are unified in this joy of a life that is stronger than death. The night will hold them back no longer for this same night has seen that it is love that has the last word.

Still today, the Word is travelling forward. It continues to light up and to change the hearts of so many people... sometimes even though they are unaware of it. The "broken bread", the mysterious presence of the Risen One, nourishes and comes to re-focus our eyes for the joy of the city that is waiting at the end of the journey.

- What helps me to pass from discouragement, from being turned in on myself, to a communicative trust?
- What is the place of listening to the Word and the "breaking of the bread" on my journey of faith? How can this story help me to experience the celebration in church on Sunday?
- "Were not our hearts burning within us?" — Are there essential realities in my experience that I have come to understand only after the event?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JUNE

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

LUKE 15, 11-17

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 7 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 Tue Christ Jesus was never Yes-and-No; his nature is all Yes. For in him is found the Yes to all God's promises.

2 Co 1:18-22

2 Wed Live your lives in Christ Jesus. Be rooted and built up in him, strengthened by the faith you have been taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

Col 2:6-13

3 Thu Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

Jn 6:47-51

4 Fri Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Probe me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

Ps 139

5 Sat The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

Dt 31:1-8

6 SUN Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have not come to call the just, but sinners.

Mt 9:10-13

7 Mon After the people saw the miraculous sign worked by Jesus, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.

Jn 6:1-15

8 Tue The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Jn 6:27-29

9 Wed Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

Mk 1:1-15

10 Thu You who revere the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside from him.

Sl 2:1-9

11 Fri Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

Mt 11:28-30

12 Sat Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Mt 7:7-11

13 SUN Jesus sent out the twelve, saying: Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

Mt 9:36-10:8

14 Mon Isaiah said: Once again the Lord will breathe upon us, and the wilderness will become an orchard, an orchard as green as the forest.

Is 32:15-20

15 Tue "Come," my heart says, "seek God's face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek.

Ps 27

16 Wed Praised be God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Co 1:3-7

17 Thu Jesus said: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

Jn 6:41-51

18 Fri Jesus said to his disciples: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again?

Mt 5:13-16

19 Sat Let yourselves be filled by the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.

Ep 5:14-20

20 SUN You who seek God, may your hearts live! For God listens to the poor.

Ps 69:30-37

21 Mon Clothe yourselves in humility in your relationships with others, for God gives his grace to the humble.

1 P 5:5-7

22 Tue My hope is in the God who will save me. Though I lie in darkness, the Lord is my light.

Mi 7:7-8

23 Wed Make the Lord your joy: God will give you even more than your heart's desire.

Ps 37

24 Thu St JOHN THE BAPTIST As John was completing his work, he said: Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but one is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

Ac 13:23-25

25 Fri The Lord your God is a merciful God who will not forsake you.

Dt 4:29-31

26 Sat Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to save many.

Mk 10:35-45

27 SUN Jesus told those he sent out: Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

Mt 10:37-42

28 Mon Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

Rm 12:14-21

29 Tue St PETER AND PAUL Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Mt 16:13-20

30 Wed The Lord says to his people: Do not mistreat or oppress the strangers in your midst, for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Ex 22:20-21

There was a man who had two sons. In the parable, the two sons are very different. This is the theme that comes up again and again in the Bible: Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob.... Two people who are always very different from each other. God is not content just to make copies: he loves the two brothers equally, but never in the same way. The primary reason for our differences is in this inventive love of God. This shows, on the one hand, that for God, everyone is unique. And on the other hand it shows that communion with God can be experienced in different ways, adapted to our heart.

The claim and the departure of the younger son amount to a malediction of his father: he is acting as though his father were already dead. He leaves without even saying goodbye! But even more astonishing is the attitude of the father: he does not ask any questions; he does not threaten; he does not say, "If you do this, you are no longer my son." He keeps silence; he does not protest; he does not reproach. Humanity wanted to go away, and God has let them. Jesus does not seek to understand this fact or to explain it. It is a fact, and that is all.

God's love never imposes itself. It has to be discovered and welcomed. This is why this father respects the freedom of his son right through to the end. The text says nothing of how difficult it must be for the father to see his son go away; he might be thinking that he had failed, that he had not managed to communicate his love to his son. But his love implies even the possibility that it could be rejected. And the faithfulness of his love knows how to keep silence, to wait and to hope. The love of the father for the child that he loves more than himself becomes pure hope in him.

- What touches me in the attitude of the father?
- Have I found in my experience that silence, to accept to keep quiet, can be the beginning of forgiveness?
- How can we remember that God is always at our side and never against us?



> 3

THE MORNING IN THE PARISHES

Every morning, the day began with the prayer in the parishes. For the young people, it was often a surprise to see so many of the families come to pray with them. Then small groups were formed for times of sharing which had already been prepared there: they allowed people to meet those who were giving out a commitment for others in the area. There was no lack of testimonies, especially in connection with the 'rattorios' which are so important in the parishes of the region, with their double role as place of education in the faith and centre of social life in the area. There were a large number of testimonies about many kinds of social commitment, or to speak about attention to mission and to aid for the very poor across the world.

For some of the young people, there was also the possibility of going towards marginalized people such as prisoners. Marta tells how she spent the morning of 1st January: "At 8 o'clock in the morning, about fifteen of us from different countries went to animate the eucharistic celebrations in the central prison of Milan, San Vittore. After passing several iron-plated doors, we arrived at the room which is used as a chapel. The atmosphere was a bit cold, and we quickly sat down in one corner and began to sing. Don Luigi, the chaplain, began the celebration with some words that were full of hope: 'When someone receives a visit, they receive a confirmation and a support from their visitor. This week, thousands of young people are visiting families who have been willing to welcome them, and they are also visiting those who at this moment find themselves in prison. This visit is a sign of hope for us.' We sang very simply, and we wanted our presence to be nothing other than a discreet and spontaneous sign of our desire to be close to those who find themselves in a difficult situation. We then went to the women's prison, where the atmosphere was a lot warmer. At the moment of

giving the sign of peace, the gesture of the kiss of peace took on a much stronger meaning, knowing that the Eucharist brings us together around Christ. I keep in mind the picture of a woman who said to me: 'Pray for me, and don't forget my face.'"

THE AFTERNOON AT THE 'FIERA'

This year for the first time, it was possible to distribute the meals in the halls themselves, on the first floor, before the common prayers.

The afternoon meetings aimed to take the reflection further or to open it to wider questions. On the first day, there was a Biblical reflection on the theme: "Christ is united to every human being without exception." The following day, there were regional meetings starting from the question: "How can we be people who, sustained by a life of communion in God, take on responsibilities and search with others for ways of making the earth a better place to live in?" It was important to remember that "trust does not cause us to forget the suffering of so many unfortunate people across the earth".

On the afternoon of the last day, there was the 'Forum', during which young people, especially those from other continents, presented their own countries in words and in song. Besides the forum, the range of themes was extended further that day: there was a reflection led by the brothers about vocation, about the life-long 'yes' to Christ; in another place people involved in solidarity in society talked about their different kinds of commitment; another group asked themselves the question: "What are our responsibilities for peace today, and what initiatives can we take?"

The last day, the two choirs of young Serbs from Novisad were asked to give an afternoon of Orthodox church music at the Church of Saint Ambrose, a beautiful church rich in meaning, which turned out to be too small. For these young Serbs, who are very skilful in liturgical singing, it was essential to be able to share with everyone an intimate

and precious part of their tradition of prayer.

At the 'Fiera' throughout the day, another place that was very much visited was the hall set apart as a place for silent prayer, which was very much appreciated by the thousand of young people who used it.

DON'T LET THE EXPERIENCE STOP HERE

What did the seven hundred parishes experience and discover? Father Giuseppe, from the parish of Cristo Re, wrote two months after the meeting: "The life of our parish has seen the appearance of fruit that I had not hoped for. The youth group has come back to life after being scattered for several years. In the momentum of the meeting, we invited back the young people over 20 years old, and their response astounded us. There is now a group of twenty-five to thirty young people who meet each week to travel a path of sharing and Christian formation. We finish with a prayer which includes songs from Taizé — they help so well to sustain a dialogue with Jesus. The group for 17 to 20-year-olds, who were the most active in preparing the meeting, is growing in maturity and enthusiasm. They are still very present and active in the parish. They were the ones who prepared the celebration at the end of the year, and a very large number of them came to the morning prayers and meetings. They keep in touch with the young people they welcomed, exchanging news and photos. In our parish we still have the tradition of an hour of adoration the first Friday of every month. Now during the hour we sing songs of Taizé, and people like that, even the older ones!"

In the parishes of Milan as in the towns and villages round about, there is a strong desire that what they have experienced should not stop here. In a letter to the diocese, published a few days after the meeting, Cardinal Martini highlighted a few points for reflection: "What am I now looking forward to?" he asks himself. "I am looking forward

to a church which will be a house of welcome for everyone, where no-one feels excluded." Very quickly some people said with this mother of a family: "During the meeting, we made an effort to welcome with all our heart young people coming from far away. What can we do now to welcome the young people who live nearby in our area, but who are far away in another sense? How can we fix our attention on welcoming in the place where we live?"

Cardinal Martini also underlined the fact that the meeting had put together young people and adults, different movements, and different groups: how can we continue this harmony, to make the Church into a place of communion and fraternity?

With regard to prayer, the Archbishop of Milan wrote: "My hope is for a church in silent adoration before God, which could be like a people before God." Many parishes have decided to continue a prayer begun during the preparation period before the meeting, every week, or once a month; in some places two or three parishes get together for a regular prayer like this.

The last point emphasized by the Cardinal in his letter is the question of signs of hope: how to be attentive to those who are already living in service for others, and how to create hope around us?

On the last evening, to finish the meeting, Brother Roger said to everyone: "In every situation, the Gospel calls us to a fundamental attitude which is to abandon ourselves to Christ. So there is as it were a choice to be made, a decision to be taken. What decision? The decision to live in gratitude to God; yes, in an inner joy, a joy renewed at every moment. And for that, we need a resolute spirit."



Bangladesh

Immersed among the very poor

For 25 years a number of brothers of the Community have been living in Bangladesh, sharing the lives of the very poor and sharing also in the trials besetting the country. One of the brothers speaks about their daily life:

"Today the Muslims are celebrating the end of Ramadan. It is a day of joy. People greet each other with a beautiful salutation of peace. We share in these celebrations. We go by bicycle to the villages near the fraternity, invited by an old Muslim man and his family, by a woman with leprosy who is one of the most courageous people of the region, or to the house of an old beggar who, hobbling and doubled over, comes to visit us for breakfast every week. It is good to talk with him about the mercy of God. We share with these people all through the year, and for them it is a great thing to be able to invite us to their festival meal for which they have given, perhaps, their last chicken..."

"We are very much immersed in muslim society. There we discover a treasure of trust in God (of course expressed or believed in a different way). When one of our Muslim friends tells us that he prays every night for each of the brothers of our fraternity, we welcome his words, in our hearts, as a tiny seed of something great that God is going to prepare.

"Following Christ means holding oneself close to God and also close to others.' That is so true for us here, and we would like so much to express it by our lives especially with the very poor. To hold ourselves close to others means welcoming the very poor in the fraternity every day: children, women who have been abandoned or who are sick, old people who survive by begging, young people... Most of them are Muslims, but of course there are Christians among them too, there are Hindus and sometimes Buddhists. It also means being with the handicapped in a welcome centre, with

children in schools in the villages and some of the shanty-towns, with the children who live at the railway station..."

"This year we are going to make some small pilgrimages to quite remote places. One of the first will be in a region where there are many ethnic minorities - Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist - and where there has been a movement of colonization, sometimes by force, but incomers simply occupying their land with the help of the police. For 25 years this region has been closed to foreigners: there has been the destruction resulting from guerrilla war. We know many people there. Last year a tentative peace was established, and now we are able to go there. We will go to pray with the Christians in some of the villages, above all with young people, to encourage them to take the risk of trusting."

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Ateliers et Presses de Taizé

During this year of 1999, we are reflecting on some changes to the "Letter from Taizé":

- There will be a change in the name.
- Instead of six issues a year there will be only four:
 - At the beginning of the year the Letter of Brother Roger
 - and then a message every three months, forming above all an introduction to the wellsprings of Christianity, the essential sources of trust in God, with a short Bible reading for each day.

Subscriptions which have already been paid will of course be continued accordingly.